LATER POEMS 1876-1889

By Robert Browning

Selected by Evan and Marie Blackmore

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PREFACE

In 1889, a few months before his death at the age of 77, Robert Browning was asked to record his voice on Edison's newly invented machine. He speaks in a plain-spoken, forthright, vigorous way, with no frills and no pomposity. He tries to recite a few lines of a poem he had written 45 years earlier, but his mind isn't really on what he himself had done in the past; he's more interested in the present day, in the thing he now sees in front of him and the people he now sees around him, and he rallies them to give three cheers in honour of Mr Edison's invention.

That is the Robert Browning who wrote the poems gathered here: a man still young in his sixties and seventies, brimming with life, and constantly intrigued by the lives and doings of other people. His poetry is as varied as life itself. Much of the time it's perfectly clear what is going on; some of the time you're not quite sure what to make of it; occasionally it's altogether mystifying, perhaps with the kind of bizarre logic found in dreams, for instance.

Some of the most mysterious pieces are preceded, inside square brackets, by brief explanations written by Browning's contemporaries. Even if the explanations are not always accurate, they may still be interesting because they show how these poems were understood by some of their first readers.

Browning was enormously prolific. He generated poetry abundantly from his teens right through to his late seventies. Most people, naturally, start reading his work at the beginning, or near the beginning, so his final poems don't tend to get much attention. This selection concentrates on those final poems, the ones that he published between 1876 and 1889. The compilation is designed to accompany the audio recording *Robert Browning: Later Poems 1876–1889,* narrated by Evan and Marie Blackmore, issued by Voices of Today (Spoken Realms, 2024).

ABBREVIATIONS

The explanatory notes are abridged from the following sources:

Berdoe: Edward Berdoe, *The Browning Cyclopædia,* 2nd edn (London: Allen & Unwin, 1897).

Defries: Esther Phoebe Defries, *A Browning Primer* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898).

Orr: Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning,* 6th edn (London: Bell, 1892).

Porter-Clarke: *Complete Works of Robert Browning,* ed. Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, 13 vols. (New York: Crowell, 1898).

Scudder: *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Browning,* ed. Horace E. Scudder (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1895).

POEMS

HOUSE

Shall I sonnet-sing you about myself?
  Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
  "Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?"

Invite the world, as my betters have done?
  "Take notice: this building remains on view,
Its suites of reception every one,
  Its private apartment and bedroom too;

"For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."
  No: thanking the public, I must decline.
A peep through my window, if folk prefer;
  But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
  In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced
And a house stood gaping, naught to balk
  Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
  The inside gaped: exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
  Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt!
  "Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth!
What a parcel of musty old books about!
  He smoked,—no wonder he lost his health!

"I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.
  A brazier?—the pagan, he burned perfumes!
You see it is proved, what the neighbors guessed:
  His wife and himself had separate rooms."

Friends, the goodman of the house at least
  Kept house to himself till an earthquake came:
'Tis the fall of its frontage permits you feast
  On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

Outside should suffice for evidence:
  And whoso desires to penetrate
Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense—
  No optics like yours, at any rate!

“Hoity-toity! A street to explore,
Your house the exception! *‘With this same key*
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,’ once more!”
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

SHOP

So, friend, your shop was all your house!
  Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
  To what diversity of treat
  Behind its glass—the single sheet!

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:
  Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;
  Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:
  Queer names, too, such a catalogue!

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
  Which blocks the window's vastitude,
—Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
  Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
  On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
  What must the habitation prove?
The true house with no name a-top—
  The mansion, distant one remove,
  Once get him off his traffic-groove!

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
  And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these city chaps!
  Or else he's social, takes his rest
  On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

"Some suburb-palace, parked about
  And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
  Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
  But then he takes the rail, that's clear.

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
  Some out-o'-the-way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighborhood suspects
  Little that he who rambles lone
  Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!"

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
  Fit to receive and entertain,—
Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
  From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—
  Nor country-box was soul's domain!

Nowise! At back of all that spread
  Of merchandise, woe's me, I find
A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
  The owner couched, his ware behind,
  —In cupboard suited to his mind.

For why? He saw no use of life
  But, while he drove a roaring trade,
To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
  To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid,
  Yet zero in my profits made!

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?
  Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
This article, no such great shakes,
  Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore
  The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!"

'Twas lodging best to live most nigh
  (Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)
Receipt of Custom; ear and eye
  Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see
  The bustle in the shop!" quoth he.

My fancy of a merchant-prince
  Was different. Through his wares we groped
Our darkling way to—not to mince
  The matter—no black den where moped
  The master if we interloped!

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?
  What did he want with comforts there?
"Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
  So goods on sale show rich and rare!
  'Sell and scud home,' be shop's affair!"

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!
  Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble,—see, he throws
  You choice of jewels, every one,
  Good, better, best, star, moon, and sun!

Which lies within your power of purse?
  This ruby that would tip aright
Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
  Wants simply coral, the delight
  Of teething baby,—stuff to bite!

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
  Your purchase, prompt your money rang
On counter,—scarce the man forsook
  His study of the "Times," just swang
  Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,—

Then off made buyer with a prize,
  Then seller to his "Times" returned;
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
  Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
  He locked door long ere candle burned.

And whither went he? Ask himself,
  Not me! To change of scene, I think.
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
  Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
  Nor all his music—money-chink.

Because a man has shop to mind
  In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
  All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
  All loves except what trade can give?

I want to know a butcher paints,
  A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
  His soul with song, or, haply mute,
  Blows out his brains upon the flute!

But—shop each day and all day long!
  Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
  From where these sorts of treasures are,
  There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!

PISGAH-SIGHTS

[*Pisgah-Sights* are visions of the truth of life seen by one leaving it. *I* is a death-bed vision of life as it is, with its apparent hindrances and inconsistencies, and of the absolute necessity of these.... *II* depicts life as it would have been, had knowledge shone on the beginning of life instead of on its close. [Defries] [*III*] is a lyrical expression of a soul disengaged by death from the body, disporting itself in freedom from any of its old annoyances while the body finds pleasurable rest in its native earth. [Porter-Clarke]]

I

Over the ball of it,
  Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
  Life there, outlying!
Roughness and smoothness,
  Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
  One reconcilement.

Orbed as appointed,
  Sister with brother
Joins, ne'er disjointed
  One from the other.
All's lend-and-borrow;
  Good, see, wants evil,
Joy demands sorrow,
  Angel weds devil!

"Which things must—*why* be?"
  Vain our endeavor!
So shall things aye be
  As they were ever.
"Such things should *so* be!"
  Sage our desistence!
Rough-smooth let globe be,
  Mixed—man's existence!

Man—wise and foolish,
  Lover and scorner,
Docile and mulish—
  Keep each his corner!
Honey yet gall of it!
  There's the life lying,
And I see all of it,
  Only, I'm dying!

II

Could I but live again
  Twice my life over,
Would I once strive again?
  Would not I cover
Quietly all of it—
  Greed and ambition—
So, from the pall of it,
  Pass to fruition?

“Soft!” I’d say, “Soul mine!
  Three-score and ten years,
Let the blind mole mine
  Digging out deniers!
Let the dazed hawk soar,
  Claim the sun’s rights too!
Turf ’tis thy walk’s o’er,
  Foliage thy flight’s to.”

Only a learner,
  Quick one or slow one,
Just a discerner,
  I would teach no one.
I am earth’s native:
  No rearranging it!
I be creative,
  Chopping and changing it?

March, men, my fellows!
  Those who, above me,
(Distance so mellows)
  Fancy you love me:
Those who, below me,
  (Distance makes great so)
Free to forego me,
  Fancy you hate so!

Praising, reviling,
  Worst head and best head,
Past me defiling,
  Never arrested,
Wanters, abounders,
  March, in gay mixture,
Men, my surrounders!
  I am the fixture.

So shall I fear thee,
  Mightiness yonder!
Mock-sun—more near thee,
  What is to wonder?
So shall I love thee,
  Down in the dark,—lest
Glowworm I prove thee,
  Star that now sparklest!

III

Good, to forgive;
  Best, to forget!
  Living, we fret;
Dying, we live.
Fretless and free,
  Soul, clap thy pinion!
  Earth have dominion,
Body, o’er thee!

Wander at will,
  Day after day,—
  Wander away,
Wandering still—
Soul that canst soar!
  Body may slumber:
  Body shall cumber
Soul-flight no more.

Waft of soul’s wing!
  What lies above?
  Sunshine and Love,
Skyblue and Spring!
Body hides—where?
  Ferns of all feather,
  Mosses and heather,
Yours be the care!

NATURAL MAGIC

[*Natural Magic* attests the power of love to bring, as by enchantment, summer with its warmth and blossoms, into a barren life. [Orr]]

All I can say is—I saw it!
The room was as bare as your hand.
I locked in the swarth little lady,—I swear,
From the head to the foot of her—well, quite as bare!
"No Nautch shall cheat me," said I, "taking my stand
At this bolt which I draw!" And this bolt—I withdraw it,
And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With—who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'erflowered?
Impossible! Only—I saw it!

All I can sing is—I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution, indeed?
Walls, ceiling and floor,—not a chance for a weed!
Wide opens the entrance; where's cold now, where's gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it,
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bringing,
These fruits of your bearing—nay, birds of your winging!
A fairy-tale! Only—I feel it!

MAGICAL NATURE

Flower—I never fancied, jewel—I profess you!
  Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a flower.
Save but glow inside and—jewel, I should guess you,
  Dim to sight and rough to touch: the glory is the dower.

You, forsooth, a flower? Nay, my love, a jewel—
  Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime!
Time may fray the flower-face: kind be time or cruel,
  Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time!

NUMPHOLEPTOS

[The Browning Society became so puzzled over the interpretation of this poem that through Dr. Furnivall it applied to the poet for an explanation and he replied: “Is not the key to the meaning of the poem in its title νυμφόληπτος (caught or rapt by a nymph) not γυναικεραστής (a woman lover)? An allegory, that is, of an impossible ideal object of love, accepted conventionally as such by a man who, all the while, cannot quite blind himself to the demonstrable fact that... such a being is imaginary, not real, a nymph and no woman.... I had no particular woman in my mind; certainly never intended to personify wisdom, philosophy, or any other abstraction.” [Scudder] The man is ensnared to undertake a series of quests colored by the unnatural broken light emanating from this unreal feminity, in the vain hope of gaining a genuine human love from her in return. [Porter-Clarke]]

Still you stand, still you listen, still you smile!
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft
I could believe your moonbeam-smile has past
The pallid limit, lies, transformed at last
To sunlight and salvation—warms the soul
It sweetens, softens! Would you pass that goal,
Gain love’s birth at the limit’s happier verge,
And, where an iridescence lurks, but urge
The hesitating pallor on to prime
Of dawn!—true blood-streaked, sun-warmth, action-time,
By heart-pulse ripened to a ruddy glow
Of gold above my clay—I scarce should know
From gold’s self, thus suffused! For gold means love.
What means the sad slow silver smile above
My clay but pity, pardon?—at the best,
But acquiescence that I take my rest,
Contented to be clay, while in your heaven
The sun reserves love for the Spirit-Seven
Companioning God’s throne they lamp before,
—Leaves earth a mute waste only wandered o’er
By that pale soft sweet disempassioned moon
Which smiles me slow forgiveness! Such, the boon
I beg? Nay, dear, submit to this—just this
Supreme endeavor! As my lips now kiss
Your feet, my arms convulse your shrouding robe,
My eyes, acquainted with the dust, dare probe
Your eyes above for—what, if born, would blind
Mine with redundant bliss, as flash may find
The inert nerve, sting awake the palsied limb,
Bid with life’s ecstasy sense overbrim
And suck back death in the resurging joy—
Love, the love whole and sole without alloy!

Vainly! The promise withers! I employ
Lips, arms, eyes, pray the prayer which finds the word,
Make the appeal which must be felt, not heard,
And none the more is changed your calm regard:
Rather, its sweet and soft grow harsh, and hard—
Forbearance, then repulsion, then disdain.
Avert the rest! I rise, see!—make, again
Once more, the old departure for some track
Untried, yet through a world which brings me back
Ever thus fruitlessly to find your feet,
To fix your eyes, to pray the soft and sweet
Which smile there—take from his new pilgrimage
Your outcast, once your inmate, and assuage
With love—not placid pardon now—his thirst
For a mere drop from out the ocean erst
He drank at! Well, the quest shall be renewed.
Fear nothing! Though I linger, unembued
With any drop, my lips thus close. I go!
So did I leave you, I have found you so,
And doubtlessly, if fated to return,
So shall my pleading persevere and earn
Pardon—not love—in that same smile, I learn,
And lose the meaning of, to learn once more,
Vainly!

What fairy track do I explore?
What magic hall return to, like the gem
Centuply-angled o'er a diadem?
You dwell there, hearted; from your midmost home
Rays forth—through that fantastic world I roam
Ever—from centre to circumference,
Shaft upon colored shaft: this crimsons thence,
That purples out its precinct through the waste.
Surely I had your sanction when I faced,
Fared forth upon that untried yellow ray
Whence I retrack my steps? They end to-day
Where they began, before your feet, beneath
Your eyes, your smile: the blade is shut in sheath,
Fire quenched in flint; irradiation, late
Triumphant through the distance, finds its fate,
Merged in your blank pure soul, alike the source
And tomb of that prismatic glow: divorce
Absolute, all-conclusive! Forth I fared,
Treading the lambent flamelet: little cared
If now its flickering took the topaz tint,
If now my dull-caked path gave sulphury hint
Of subterranean rage—no stay nor stint
To yellow, since you sanctioned that I bathe,
Burnish me, soul and body, swim and swathe
In yellow license. Here I reek suffused

With crocus, saffron, orange, as I used
With scarlet, purple, every dye o' the bow
Born of the storm-cloud. As before, you show
Scarce recognition, no approval, some
Mistrust, more wonder at a man become
Monstrous in garb, nay—flesh disguised as well,
Through his adventure. Whatsoe'er befell,
I followed, wheresoe'er it wound, that vein
You authorized should leave your whiteness, stain
Earth's sombre stretch beyond your midmost place
Of vantage,—trode that tinct whereof the trace
On garb and flesh repel you! Yes, I plead
Your own permission—your command, indeed,
That who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge shrined those eyes above,
Go boldly on adventure, break through bounds
O' the quintessential whiteness that surrounds
Your feet, obtain experience of each tinge
That bickers forth to broaden out, impinge
Plainer his foot its pathway all distinct
From every other. Ah, the wonder, linked
With fear, as exploration manifests
What agency it was first tipped the crests
Of unnamed wildflower, soon protruding grew
Portentous 'mid the sands, as when his hue
Betrays him and the burrowing snake gleams through;
Till, last... but why parade more shame and pain?
Are not the proofs upon me? Here again
I pass into your presence, I receive
Your smile of pity, pardon, and I leave...
No, not this last of times I leave you, mute,
Submitted to my penance, so my foot
May yet again adventure, tread, from source
To issue, one more ray of rays which course
Each other, at your bidding, from the sphere
Silver and sweet, their birthplace, down that drear
Dark of the world,—you promise shall return
Your pilgrim jewelled as with drops o' the urn
The rainbow paints from, and no smatch at all
Of ghastliness at edge of some cloud-pall
Heaven cowers before, as earth awaits the fall
O' the bolt and flash of doom. Who trusts your word
Tries the adventure: and returns—absurd
As frightful—in that sulphur-steeped disguise
Mocking the priestly cloth-of-gold, sole prize
The arch-heretic was wont to bear away
Until he reached the burning. No, I say:
No fresh adventure! No more seeking love
At end of toil, and finding, calm above
My passion, the old statuesque regard,

The sad petrific smile!

O you—less hard
And hateful than mistaken and obtuse
Unreason of a she-intelligence!
You very woman with the pert pretence
To match the male achievement! Like enough!
Ay, you were easy victors, did the rough
Straightway efface itself to smooth, the gruff
Grind down and grow a whisper,—did man's truth
Subdue, for sake of chivalry and ruth,
Its rapier-edge to suit the bulrush-spear
Womanly falsehood fights with! O that ear
All fact pricks rudely, that thrice-superfine
Feminity of sense, with right divine
To waive all process, take result stain-free
From out the very muck wherein...

Ah me!
The true slave's querulous outbreak! All the rest
Be resignation! Forth at your behest
I fare. Who knows but this—the crimson-quest—
May deepen to a sunrise, not decay
To that cold sad sweet smile?—which I obey.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER

[St. Martin's Summer argues that old loves though buried come forth in ghostly shape to haunt the new love, and remind it that it may not be enduring; therefore it is better not to protest too much, nor to look upon it as durable masonry, which tempts destruction, but rather as a light trellis that may either bend with circumstances, or else fall flat without causing much dismay. But... while this new love is congratulating itself upon having found a safe basis, the ghosts reassert themselves, proving that they are more real than the new love, which, in fact, receives all its glamour through the interfusion of their spirit. [Porter-Clarke]]

No protesting, dearest!
  Hardly kisses even!
    Don't we both know how it ends?
How the greenest leaf turns serest,
  Bluest outbreak—blankest heaven,
    Lovers—friends?

You would build a mansion,
  I would weave a bower
    —Want the heart for enterprise.
Walls admit of no expansion:
  Trellis-work may haply flower
    Twice the size.

What makes glad Life's Winter?
  New buds, old blooms after.
    Sad the sighing "How suspect
Beams would ere mid-Autumn splinter,
  Rooftree scarce support a rafter,
    Walls lie wrecked?"

You are young, my princess!
  I am hardly older:
    Yet—I steal a glance behind!
Dare I tell you what convinces
  Timid me that you, if bolder,
    Bold—are blind?

Where we plan our dwelling
  Glooms a graveyard surely!
    Headstone, footstone moss may drape,—
Name, date, violets hide from spelling,—
  But, though corpses rot obscurely,
    Ghosts escape.

Ghosts! O breathing Beauty,
  Give my frank word pardon!
    What if I—somehow, somewhere—
Pledged my soul to endless duty
  Many a time and oft? Be hard on
    Love—laid there?

Nay, blame grief that's fickle,
  Time that proves a traitor,
    Chance, change, all that purpose warps,—
Death who spares to thrust the sickle
  Laid Love low, through flowers which later
    Shroud the corpse!

And you, my winsome lady,
  Whisper with like frankness!
    Lies nothing buried long ago?
Are yon—which shimmer 'mid the shady
  Where moss and violet run to rankness—
    Tombs or no?

Who taxes you with murder?
  My hands are clean—or nearly!
    Love being mortal needs must pass.
Repentance? Nothing were absurder.
  Enough: we felt Love's loss severely;
    Though now—alas!

Love's corpse lies quiet therefore,
  Only Love's ghost plays truant,
    And warns us have in wholesome awe
Durable mansionry; that's wherefore
  I weave but trellis-work, pursuant
    —Life, to law.

The solid, not the fragile,
  Tempts rain and hail and thunder.
    If bower stand firm at Autumn's close,
Beyond my hope,—why, boughs were agile;
  If bower fall flat, we scarce need wonder
    Wreathing—rose!

So, truce to the protesting,
  So, muffled be the kisses!
    For, would we but avow the truth,
Sober is genuine joy. No jesting!
  Ask else Penelope, Ulysses—
    Old in youth!

For why should ghosts feel angered?
  Let all their interference
    Be faint march-music in the air!
“Up! Join the rear of us the vanguard!
  Up, lovers, dead to all appearance,
    Laggard pair!”

The while you clasp me closer,
  The while I press you deeper,
    As safe we chuckle,—under breath,
Yet all the slyer, the jocoser,—
  “So, life can boast its day, like leap-year,
    Stolen from death!”

Ah me—the sudden terror!
  Hence quick—avaunt, avoid me,
    You cheat, the ghostly flesh-disguised!
Nay, all the ghosts in one! Strange error!
  So, ’twas Death’s self that clipped and coyed me,
    Loved—and lied!

Ay, dead loves are the potent!
  Like any cloud they used you,
    Mere semblance you, but substance they!
Build we no mansion, weave we no tent!
  Mere flesh—their spirit interfused you!
    Hence, I say!

All theirs, none yours the glamour!
  Theirs each low word that won me,
    Soft look that found me Love’s, and left
What else but you—the tears and clamor
  That’s all your very own! Undone me—
    Ghost-bereft!

PAN AND LUNA

Si credere dignum est.—*Georgic,* III. 390.

Oh, worthy of belief I hold it was,
Virgil, your legend in those strange three lines!
No question, that adventure came to pass
One black night in Arcadia: yes, the pines,
Mountains and valleys mingling made one mass
Of black with void black heaven: the earth's confines,
The sky's embrace,—below, above, around,
All hardened into black without a bound.

Fill up a swart stone chalice to the brim
With fresh-squeezed yet fast-thickening poppy-juice:
See how the sluggish jelly, late a-swim,
Turns marble to the touch of who would loose
The solid smooth, grown jet from rim to rim,
By turning round the bowl! So night can fuse
Earth with her all-comprising sky. No less,
Light, the least spark, shows air and emptiness.

And thus it proved when—diving into space,
Stript of all vapor, from each web of mist
Utterly film-free—entered on her race
The naked Moon, full-orbed antagonist
Of night and dark, night's dowry: peak to base,
Upstarted mountains, and each valley, kissed
To sudden life, lay silver-bright: in air
Flew she revealed, Maid-Moon with limbs all bare.

Still as she fled, each depth—where refuge seemed—
Opening a lone pale chamber, left distinct
Those limbs: 'mid still-retreating blue, she teemed
Herself with whiteness,—virginal, uncinct
By any halo save what finely gleamed
To outline not disguise her: heaven was linked
In one accord with earth to quaff the joy,
Drain beauty to the dregs without alloy.

Whereof she grew aware. What help? When, lo,
A succorable cloud with sleep lay dense:
Some pinetree-top had caught it sailing slow,
And tethered for a prize: in evidence
Captive lay fleece on fleece of piled-up snow
Drowsily patient: flake-heaped how or whence,
The structure of that succorable cloud,
What matter? Shamed she plunged into its shroud.

Orbed—so the woman-figure poets call
Because of rounds on rounds—that apple-shaped
Head which its hair binds close into a ball
Each side the curving ears—that pure undraped
Pout of the sister paps—that... Once for all,
Say—her consummate circle thus escaped
With its innumerous circlets, sank absorbed,
Safe in the cloud—O naked Moon full-orbed!

But what means this? The downy swathes combine,
Conglobe, the smothery coy-caressing stuff
Curdles about her! Vain each twist and twine
Those lithe limbs try, encroached on by a fluff
Fitting as close as fits the dented spine
Its flexible ivory outside-flesh: enough!
The plumy drifts contract, condense, constringe,
Till she is swallowed by the feathery springe.

As when a pearl slips lost in the thin foam
Churned on a sea-shore, and, o'er-frothed, conceits
Herself safe-housed in Amphitrite's dome,—
If, through the bladdery wave-worked yeast, she meets
What most she loathes and leaps from,—elf from gnome
No gladlier,—finds that safest of retreats
Bubble about a treacherous hand wide ope
To grasp her—(divers who pick pearls so grope)—

So lay this Maid-Moon clasped around and caught
By rough red Pan, the god of all that tract:
He it was schemed the snare thus subtly wrought
With simulated earth-breath,—wool-tufts packed
Into a billowy wrappage. Sheep far-sought
For spotless shearings yield such: take the fact
As learned Virgil gives it,—how the breed
Whitens itself forever: yes, indeed!

If one forefather ram, though pure as chalk
From tinge on fleece, should still display a tongue
Black 'neath the beast's moist palate, prompt men balk
The propagating plague: he gets no young:
They rather slay him,—sell his hide to calk
Ships with, first steeped in pitch,—nor hands are wrung
In sorrow for his fate: protected thus,
The purity we love is gained for us.

So did Girl-Moon, by just her attribute
Of unmatched modesty betrayed, lie trapped,
Bruised to the breast of Pan, half god half brute,
Raked by his bristly boar-sward while he lapped
—Never say, kissed her! that were to pollute
Love's language—which moreover proves unapt
To tell now she recoiled—as who finds thorns
Where she sought flowers—when, feeling, she touched—horns!

Then—does the legend say?—first moon-eclipse
Happened, first swooning-fit which puzzled sore
The early sages? Is that why she dips
Into the dark, a minute and no more,
Only so long as serves her while she rips
The cloud's womb through and, faultless as before,
Pursues her way? No lesson for a maid
Left she, a maid herself thus trapped, betrayed?

Ha, Virgil? Tell the rest, you! "To the deep
Of his domain the wildwood, Pan forthwith
Called her, and so she followed"—in her sleep,
Surely?—"by no means spurning him." The myth
Explain who may! Let all else go, I keep
—As of a ruin just a monolith—
Thus much, one verse of five words, each a boon:
Arcadia, night, a cloud, Pan, and the moon.

“TOUCH HIM NE’ER SO LIGHTLY...”

“Touch him ne’er so lightly, into song he broke:
Soil so quick-receptive,—not one feather-seed,
Not one flower-dust fell but straight its fall awoke
Vitalizing virtue: song would song succeed
Sudden as spontaneous—prove a poet-soul!”
Indeed?
Rock’s the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare:
Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there:
Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after-age
Knows and names a pine, a nation’s heritage.

Thus I wrote in London, musing on my betters,
Poets dead and gone; and lo, the critics cried,
“Out on such a boast!” as if I dreamed that fetters
Binding Dante bind up—me! as if true pride
Were not also humble!
So I smiled and sighed
As I oped your book in Venice this bright morning,
Sweet new friend of mine! and felt the clay or sand,
Whatsoe’er my soil be, break—for praise or scorning—
Out in grateful fancies—weeds; but weeds expand
Almost into flowers, held by such a kindly hand.

“WANTING IS—WHAT?”

[“Wanting is—what?” may simply express that no beauty is perfect without its complement, love; or it may refer more particularly to Divine love, without which life is incomplete. The latter interpretation is rendered probable on account of the use of the term, “O comer”... which... is one of the titles of the Messiah in the New Testament, “ὁ ἐρχόμενος,” the Future One, He who shall come. [Porter-Clarke]]

Wanting is—what?
Summer redundant,
Blueness abundant,
—Where is the blot?
Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
—Framework which waits for a picture to frame:
What of the leafage, what of the flower?
Roses embowering with naught they embower!
Come then, complete incompletion, O comer,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer!
Breathe but one breath
Rose-beauty above,
And all that was death
Grows life, grows love,
Grows love!

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE

Never the time and the place
  And the loved one all together!
This path—how soft to pace!
  This May—what magic weather!
Where is the loved one’s face?
In a dream that loved one’s face meets mine,
  But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
  With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
  With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy sly and serpentine,
  Uncoil thee from the waking man!
    Do I hold the Past
    Thus firm and fast
  Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?
  This path so soft to pace shall lead
  Through the magic of May to herself indeed!
  Or narrow if needs the house must be,
  Outside are the storms and strangers: we—
  Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
    —I and she!

PROLOGUE TO *ASOLANDO*

"The Poet's age is sad: for why?
  In youth, the natural world could show
No common object but his eye
  At once involved with alien glow—
His own soul's iris-bow.

"And now a flower is just a flower:
  Man, bird, beast are but beast, bird, man—
Simply themselves, uncinct by dower
  Of dyes which, when life's day began,
Round each in glory ran."

Friend, did you need an optic glass,
  Which were your choice? A lens to drape
In ruby, emerald, chrysopras,
  Each object—or reveal its shape
Clear outlined, past escape,

The naked very thing?—so clear
  That, when you had the chance to gaze,
You found its inmost self appear
  Through outer seeming—truth ablaze,
Not falsehood's fancy-haze?

How many a year, my Asolo,
  Since—one step just from sea to land—
I found you, loved yet feared you so—
  For natural objects seemed to stand
Palpably fire-clothed! No—

No mastery of mine o'er these!
  Terror with beauty, like the Bush
Burning but unconsumed. Bend knees,
  Drop eyes to earthward! Language? Tush!
Silence 'tis awe decrees.

And now? The lambent flame is—where?
  Lost from the naked world: earth, sky,
Hill, vale, tree, flower,—Italia's rare
  O'er-running beauty crowds the eye—
But flame? The Bush is bare.

Hill, vale, tree, flower—they stand distinct,
  Nature to know and name. What then?
A Voice spoke thence which straight unlinked
  Fancy from fact: see, all's in ken:
Has once my eyelid winked?

No, for the purged ear apprehends
  Earth's import, not the eye late dazed.
The Voice said, "Call my works thy friends!
  At Nature dost thou shrink amazed?
God is it who transcends."

DUBIETY

I will be happy if but for once:
  Only help me, Autumn weather,
Me and my cares to screen, ensconce
  In luxury's sofa-lap of leather!

Sleep? Nay, comfort—with just a cloud
  Suffusing day too clear and bright:
Eve's essence, the single drop allowed
  To sully, like milk, Noon's water-white.

Let gauziness shade, not shroud—adjust,
  Dim and not deaden,—somehow sheathe
Aught sharp in the rough world's busy thrust,
  If it reach me through dreaming's vapor-wreath.

Be life so, all things ever the same!
  For, what has disarmed the world? Outside,
Quiet and peace: inside, nor blame
  Nor want, nor wish whate'er betide.

What is it like that has happened before?
  A dream? No dream, more real by much.
A vision? But fanciful days of yore
  Brought many: mere musing seems not such.

Perhaps but a memory, after all!
  —Of what came once when a woman leant
To feel for my brow where her kiss might fall.
  Truth ever, truth only the excellent!

NOW

Out of your whole life give but a moment!
All of your life that has gone before,
All to come after it,—so you ignore,
So you make perfect the present,—condense,
In a rapture of rage, for perfection's endowment,
Thought and feeling and soul and sense—
Merged in a moment which gives me at last
You around me for once, you beneath me, above me—
Me—sure that despite of time future, time past,—
This tick of our life-time's one moment you love me!
How long such suspension may linger? Ah, Sweet—
The moment eternal—just that and no more—
When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core
While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut and lips meet!

HUMILITY

What girl but, having gathered flowers,
Stript the beds and spoilt the bowers,
From the lapful light she carries
Drops a careless bud?—nor tarries
To regain the waif and stray:
“Store enough for home”—she’ll say.

So say I too: give your lover
Heaps of loving—under, over,
Whelm him—make the one the wealthy!
Am I all so poor who—stealthy
Work it was!—picked up what fell:
Not the worst bud—who can tell?

POETICS

"So say the foolish!" Say the foolish so, Love?
"Flower she is, my rose"—or else, "My very swan is she"—
Or perhaps, "Yon maid-moon, blessing earth below, Love,
That art thou!"—to them, belike: no such vain words from me.

"Hush, rose, blush! no balm like breath," I chide it:
"Bend thy neck its best, swan,—hers the whiter curve!"
Be the moon the moon: my Love I place beside it:
What is she? Her human self,—no lower word will serve.

SUMMUM BONUM

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
  All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
  Breath and bloom, shade and shine,—wonder, wealth, and—how far above them—
    Truth, that’s brighter than gem,
    Trust, that’s purer than pearl,—
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe—all were for me
    In the kiss of one girl.

A PEARL, A GIRL

A simple ring with a single stone,
  To the vulgar eye no stone of price:
Whisper the right word, that alone—
  Forth starts a sprite, like fire from ice,
And lo, you are lord (says an Eastern scroll)
Of heaven and earth, lord whole and sole
  Through the power in a pearl.

A woman (’tis I this time that say)
  With little the world counts worthy praise;
Utter the true word—out and away
  Escapes her soul: I am wrapt in blaze,
Creation’s lord, of heaven and earth
Lord whole and sole—by a minute’s birth—
  Through the love in a girl!

SPECULATIVE

Others may need new life in Heaven—
  Man, Nature, Art—made new, assume!
Man with new mind old sense to leaven,
  Nature,—new light to clear old gloom,
Art that breaks bounds, gets soaring-room.

I shall pray: “Fugitive as precious—
  Minutes which passed,—return, remain!
Let earth’s old life once more enmesh us,
  You with old pleasure, me—old pain,
So we but meet nor part again!”

WHITE WITCHCRAFT

If you and I could change to beasts, what beast should either be?
Shall you and I play Jove for once? Turn fox then, I decree!
Shy wild sweet stealer of the grapes! Now do your worst on me!

And thus you think to spite your friend—turned loathsome? What, a toad?
So, all men shrink and shun me! Dear men, pursue your road!
Leave but my crevice in the stone, a reptile's fit abode!

Now say your worst, Canidia! "He's loathsome, I allow:
There may or may not lurk a pearl beneath his puckered brow:
But see his eyes that follow mine—love lasts there, anyhow."

BAD DREAMS

[*I.* The lover sees that the face of the loved one has changed: love has died out of the eyes.... With a breaking heart the lover can say that love is still the same for him. *II.* A weird dream of a strange ball, a dance of death and hell.... The dreamer sees a worshipper—his wife—enter, to palliate or expurgate her soul of some ugly stain. [Berdoe] How, now, is her apparent outward self to be reconciled with that hidden night-debauch? Her reply is the dream she had, one utterly whimsical and inconsequential, which disarms his and makes light of it. [Porter-Clarke] *III* is a dream of a primeval forest and a lucid city.... Each in its place is seen to be good and worthy, but when each devours the other both are accurst.... *IV.* The wife's tomb.... Her husband comes to visit the grave. Was he her lover?—rather the cold critic of her life.... Was the date on the stone the record of the day when his chance stab of scorn killed her? [Berdoe]]

I

Last night I saw you in my sleep:
  And how your charm of face was changed!
I asked, "Some love, some faith you keep?"
  You answered, "Faith gone, love estranged."

Whereat I woke—a twofold bliss:
  Waking was one, but next there came
This other: "Though I felt, for this,
  My heart break, I loved on the same."

II

You in the flesh and here—
  Your very self! Now, wait!
One word! May I hope or fear?
  Must I speak in love or hate?
Stay while I ruminate!

The fact and each circumstance
  Dare you disown? Not you!
That vast dome, that huge dance,
  And the gloom which overgrew
A—possibly festive crew!

For why should men dance at all—
  Why women—a crowd of both—
Unless they are gay? Strange ball—
  Hands and feet plighting troth,
Yet partners enforced and loth!

Of who danced there, no shape
  Did I recognize: thwart, perverse,
Each grasped each, past escape
  In a whirl or weary or worse;
Man’s sneer met woman’s curse,

While he and she toiled as if
  Their guardian set galley-slaves
To supple chained limbs grown stiff;
  Unmanacled trulls and knaves—
The lash for who misbehaves!

And a gloom was, all the while,
  Deeper and deeper yet
O’ergrowing the rank and file
  Of that army of haters—set
To mimic love’s fever-fret.

By the wall-side close I crept,
  Avoiding the livid maze,
And, safely so far, outstepped
  On a chamber—a chapel, says
My memory or betrays—

Closet-like, kept aloof
  From unseemly witnessing
What sport made floor and roof
  Of the Devil’s palace ring
While his Damned amused their king.

Ay, for a low lamp burned,
  And a silence lay about
What I, in the midst, discerned
  Though dimly till, past doubt,
’Twas a sort of throne stood out—

High seat with steps, at least:
  And the topmost step was filled
By—whom? What vestured priest?
  A stranger to me,—his guild,
His cult, unreconciled

To my knowledge how guild and cult
  Are clothed in this world of ours:
I pondered, but no result
  Came to—unless that Giaours
So worship the Lower Powers.

When suddenly who entered?
  Who knelt—did you guess I saw?
Who—raising that face were centred
  Allegiance to love and law
So lately—off-casting awe,

Down-treading reserve, away
  Thrusting respect... but mine
Stands firm—firm still shall stay!
  Ask Satan! for I decline
To tell—what I saw, in fine!

Yet here in the flesh you come—
  Your same self, form and face,—
In the eyes, mirth still at home!
  On the lips, that commonplace
Perfection of honest grace!

Yet your errand is—needs must be—
  To palliate—well, explain,
Expurgate in some degree
  Your soul of its ugly stain.
Oh, you—the good in grain—

How was it your white took tinge?
  “A mere dream”—never object!
Sleep leaves a door on hinge
  Whence soul, ere our flesh suspect,
Is off and away: detect

Her vagaries when loose, who can!
  Be she pranksome, be she prude,
Disguise with the day began:
  With the night—ah, what ensued
From draughts of a drink hell-brewed?

Then She: “What a queer wild dream!
  And perhaps the best fun is—
Myself had its fellow—I seem
  Scarce awake from yet. ’Twas this—
Shall I tell you? First, a kiss!

“For the fault was just your own,—
  ’Tis myself expect apology:
You warned me to let alone
  (Since our studies were mere philology)
That ticklish (you said) Anthology.

“So I dreamed that I passed *exam*
  Till a question posed me sore:
‘Who translated this epigram
  By—an author we best ignore?’
And I answered, ‘Hannah More’!”

III

This was my dream: I saw a Forest
  Old as the earth, no track nor trace
Of unmade man. Thou, Soul, explorest—
  Though in a trembling rapture—space
Immeasurable! Shrubs, turned trees,
Trees that touch heaven, support its freize
Studded with sun and moon and star:
While—oh, the enormous growths that bar
Mine eye from penetrating past
  Their tangled twine where lurks—nay, lives
Royally lone, some brute-type cast
  I’ the rough, time cancels, man forgives.

On, Soul! I saw a lucid City
  Of architectural device
Every way perfect. Pause for pity,
  Lightning! nor leave a cicatrice
On those bright marbles, dome and spire,
Structures palatial,—streets which mire
Dares not defile, paved all too fine
For human footstep’s smirch, not thine—
Proud solitary traverser,
  My Soul, of silent lengths of way—
With what ecstatic dread, aver,
  Lest life start sanctioned by thy stay!

Ah, but the last sight was the hideous!
  A City, yes,—a Forest, true,—
But each devouring each. Perfidious
  Snake-plants had strangled what I knew
Was a pavilion once: each oak
Held on his horns some spoil he broke
By surreptitiously beneath
Upthrusting: pavements, as with teeth,
Griped huge weed widening crack and split
  In squares and circles stone-work erst.
Oh, Nature—good! Oh, Art—no whit
Less worthy! Both in one—accurst!

IV

It happened thus: my slab, though new,
  Was getting weather-stained,—beside,
Herbage, balm, peppermint o'ergrew
  Letter and letter: till you tried
Somewhat, the Name was scarce descried.

That strong stern man my lover came:
  —Was he my lover? Call him, pray,
My life's cold critic bent on blame
  Of all poor I could do or say
To make me worth his love one day—

One far day when, by diligent
  And dutiful amending faults,
Foibles, all weaknesses which went
  To challenge and excuse assaults
Of culture wronged by taste that halts—

Discrepancies should mar no plan
  Symmetric of the qualities
Claiming respect from—say—a man
  That's strong and stern. "Once more he pries
Into me with those critic eyes!"

No question! so—"Conclude, condemn
  Each failure my poor self avows!
Leave to its fate all you contemn!
  There's Solomon's selected spouse:
Earth needs must hold such maids—choose them!"

Why, he was weeping! Surely gone
  Sternness and strength: with eyes to ground
And voice a broken monotone—
  "Only be as you were! Abound
In foibles, faults,—laugh, robed and crowned

"As Folly's veriest queen,—care I
  One feather-fluff? Look pity, Love,
On prostrate me—your foot shall try
  This forehead's use—mount thence above,
And reach what Heaven you dignify!"

Now, what could bring such change about?
  The thought perplexed: till, following
His gaze upon the ground,—why, out
  Came all the secret! So, a thing
Thus simple has deposed my king!

For, spite of weeds that strove to spoil
  Plain reading on the lettered slab,
My name was clear enough—no soil
  Effaced the date when one chance stab
Of scorn... if only ghosts might blab!

INAPPREHENSIVENESS

We two stood simply friend-like side by side,
Viewing a twilight country far and wide,
Till she at length broke silence. “How it towers
Yonder, the ruin o’er this vale of ours!
The West’s faint flare behind it so relieves
Its rugged outline—sight perhaps deceives,
Or I could almost fancy that I see
A branch wave plain—belike some wind-sown tree
Chance-rooted where a missing turret was.
What would I give for the perspective glass
At home, to make out if ’tis really so!
Has Ruskin noticed here at Asolo
That certain weed-growths on the ravaged wall
Seem” ... something that I could not say at all,
My thought being rather—as absorbed she sent
Look onward after look from eyes distent
With longing to reach Heaven’s gate left ajar—
“Oh, fancies that might be, oh, facts that are!
What of a wilding? By you stands, and may
So stand unnoticed till the Judgment Day,
One who, if once aware that your regard
Claimed what his heart holds,—woke, as from its sward
The flower, the dormant passion, so to speak—
Then what a rush of life would startling wreak
Revenge on your inapprehensive stare
While, from the ruin and the West’s faint flare,
You let your eyes meet mine, touch what you term
Quietude—that’s an universe in germ—
The dormant passion needing but a look
To burst into immense life!”
“No, the book
Which noticed how the wall-growths wave,” said she,
“Was not by Ruskin.”
I said, “Vernon Lee?”

THE POPE AND THE NET

What, he on whom our voices unanimously ran,
Made Pope at our last Conclave? Full low his life began:
His father earned the daily bread as just a fisherman.

So much the more his boy minds book, gives proof of mother-wit,
Becomes first Deacon, and then Priest, then Bishop: see him sit
No less than Cardinal ere long, while no one cries "Unfit!"

But some one smirks, some other smiles, jogs elbow and nods head:
Each winks at each: "I'-faith, a rise! Saint Peter's net, instead
Of sword and keys, is come in vogue!" You think he blushes red?

Not he, of humble holy heart! "Unworthy me!" he sighs:
"From fisher's drudge to Church's prince—it is indeed a rise:
So, here's my way to keep the fact forever in my eyes!"

And straightway in his palace-hall, where commonly is set
Some coat-of-arms, some portraiture ancestral, lo, we met
His mean estate's reminder in his fisher-father's net!

Which step conciliates all and some, stops cavil in a trice:
"The humble holy heart that holds of newborn pride no spice!
He's just the saint to choose for Pope!" Each adds, "'Tis my advice."

So, Pope he was: and when we flocked—its sacred slipper on—
To kiss his foot, we lifted eyes, alack, the thing was gone—
That guarantee of lowlihead,—eclipsed that star which shone!

Each eyed his fellow, one and all kept silence. I cried, "Pish!
I'll make me spokesman for the rest, express the common wish.
Why, Father, is the net removed?" "Son, it hath caught the fish."

She. Yet womanhood you reverence,
So you profess!
He. With heart and soul.
She. Of which fact this is evidence!
To help Art-study,—for some dole
Of certain wretched shillings,—you
Induce a woman—virgin too—
To strip and stand stark-naked?
He. True.
She. Nor feel you so degrade her?
He. What
—(Excuse the interruption)—clings
Half-savage-like around your hat?
She. Ah, do they please you? Wild-bird-wings!
Next season,—Paris-prints assert,—
We must go feathered to the skirt:
My modiste keeps on the alert.

Owls, hawks, jays—swallows most approve.
He. Dare I speak plainly?
She. Oh, I trust!
He. Then, Lady Blanche, it less would move
In heart and soul of me disgust
Did you strip off those spoils you wear,
And stand—for thanks, not shillings—bare
To help Art like my Model there.
She well knew what absolved her—praise
In me for God's surpassing good,
Who granted to my reverent gaze
A type of purest womanhood.
You—clothed with murder of his best
Of harmless beings—stand the test!
What is it *you* know?
She. That you jest!

FLUTE-MUSIC, WITH AN ACCOMPANIMENT

He. Ah, the bird-like fluting
Through the ash-tops yonder—
Bullfinch-bubblings, soft sounds suiting
What sweet thoughts, I wonder?
Fine-pearled notes that surely
Gather, dewdrop-fashion,
Deep-down in some heart which purely
Secretes globuled passion—
Passion insuppressive—
Such is piped, for certain;
Love, no doubt, nay, love excessive
'Tis, your ash-tops curtain.

Would your ash-tops open
We might spy the player—
Seek and find some sense which no pen
Yet from singer, sayer,
Ever has extracted:
Never, to my knowledge,
Yet has pedantry enacted
That, in Cupid's College,
Just this variation
Of the old, old yearning
Should by plain speech have salvation,
Yield new men new learning.

"Love!" but what love, nicely
New from old disparted,
Would the player teach precisely?
First of all, he started
In my brain Assurance—
Trust—entire Contentment—
Passion proved by much endurance;
Then came—not resentment,
No, but simply Sorrow:
What was seen had vanished:
Yesterday so blue! To-morrow
Blank, all sunshine banished.

Hark! 'Tis Hope resurges,
Struggling through obstruction—
Forces a poor smile which verges
On Joy's introduction.
Now, perhaps, mere Musing:
"Holds earth such a wonder?
Fairy-mortal, soul-sense-fusing
Past thought's power to sunder!"
What? calm Acquiescence?

"Daisied turf gives room to
Trefoil, plucked once in her presence—
Growing by her tomb too!"

She. All's your fancy-spinning!
Here's the fact: a neighbor
Never-ending, still beginning,
Recreates his labor:
Deep o'er desk he drudges.
Adds, divides, subtracts and
Multiplies, until he judges
Noonday-hour's exact sand
Shows the hour-glass emptied:
Then comes lawful leisure,
Minutes rare from toil exempted,
Fit to spend in pleasure.

Out then with—what treatise?
Youth's Complete Instructor
How to play the Flute. Quid petis?
Follow Youth's conductor
On and on, through *Easy,*
Up to *Harder, Hardest*
Flute-piece, till thou, flautist wheezy,
Possibly discardest
Tootlings hoarse and husky,
Mayst expend with courage
Breath—on tunes once bright, now dusky—
Meant to cool thy porridge.

That's an air of Tulou's
He maltreats persistent,
Till as lief I'd hear some Zulu's
Bone-piped bag, breath-distent,
Madden native dances.
I'm the man's familiar:
Unexpectedness enhances
What your ear's auxiliar
—Fancy—finds suggestive.
Listen! That's *legato*
Rightly played, his fingers restive
Touch as if *staccato.*

He. Ah, you trick-betrayer!
Telling tales, unwise one?
So the secret of the player
Was—he could surprise one
Well-nigh into trusting
Here was a musician
Skilled consummately, yet lusting

Through no vile ambition
After making captive
All the world,—rewarded
Amply by one stranger's rapture,
Common praise discarded.

So, without assistance
Such as music rightly
Needs and claims,—defying distance,
Overleaping lightly
Obstacles which hinder,
He, for my approval,
All the same and all the kinder
Made mine what might move all
Earth to kneel adoring:
Took—while he piped Gounod's
Bit of passionate imploring—
Me for Juliet: who knows?

No! as you explain things,
All's mere repetition,
Practise-pother: of all vain things
Why waste pooh or pish on
Toilsome effort—never
Ending, still beginning
After what should pay endeavor
—Right-performance? winning
Weariness from you who,
Ready to admire some
Owl's fresh hooting—Tu-whit, tu-who—
Find stale thrush-songs tiresome.

She. Songs, Spring thought perfection,
Summer criticises:
What in May escaped detection,
August, past surprises,
Notes, and names each blunder.
You, the just-initiate,
Praise to heart's content (what wonder?)
Tootings I hear vitiate
Romeo's serenading—
I who, times full twenty,
Turned to ice—no ash-tops aiding—
At his *caldamente.*

So, 'twas distance altered
Sharps to flats? The missing
Bar when syncopation faltered
(You thought—paused for kissing!)
Ash-tops too felonious

Intercepted? Rather
Say—they well-nigh made euphonious
Discord, helped to gather
Phrase, by phrase, turn patches
Into simulated
Unity which botching matches,—
Scraps redintegrated.

He. Sweet, are you suggestive
Of an old suspicion
Which has always found me restive
To its admonition
When it ventured whisper
"Fool, the strifes and struggles
Of your trembler—blusher—lisper
Were so many juggles,
Tricks tried—oh, so often!—
Which once more do duty,
Find again a heart to soften,
Soul to snare with beauty."

Birth-blush of the briar-rose,
Mist-bloom of the hedge-sloe,
Some one gains the prize: admire rose
Would he, when noon's wedge—slow—
Sure, has pushed, expanded
Rathe pink to raw redness?
Would he covet sloe when sanded
By road-dust to deadness?
So—restore their value!
Ply a water-sprinkle!
Then guess sloe is fingered, shall you?
Find in rose a wrinkle?

Here what played Aquarius?
Distance—ash-tops aiding,
Reconciled scraps else contrarious,
Brightened stuff fast fading.
Distance—call your shyness:
Was the fair one peevish?
Coyness softened out of slyness.
Was she cunning, thievish,
All-but-proved impostor?
Bear but one day's exile,
Ugly traits were wholly lost or
Screened by fancies flexile—

Ash-tops these, you take me?
Fancies' interference
Changed...

But since I sleep, don't wake me:
What if all's appearance?
Is not outside seeming
Real as substance inside?
Both are facts, so leave me dreaming:
If who loses wins I'd
Ever lose,—conjecture,
From one phrase trilled deftly,
All the piece. So, end your lecture,
Let who lied be left lie!

“IMPERANTE AUGUSTO NATUS EST—”

[A dramatic bit conveying a vivid sense of the human atmosphere of the world when Caesarism was dominant and the dawn of Christianity, as yet unknown, was imminent. In it a Roman tells another Roman... of an incident of the day before that vaguely terrified him.... With his head full of the idea of the Emperor’s glory... he runs across a beggar.... He tosses him a coin, and recognizes—Augustus! recalling the rumor that once a year, to disarm Fortune, the Emperor plays the beggar.... [The title] *“Imperante Augusto, natus est—”* [means] “he was born in the reign of Augustus”... the reference being to Christ.... Augustus was said... to have consulted the oracles... to learn who should succeed him, and was told that a Judaean child was his lord and enemy. [Porter-Clarke]]

What it was struck the terror into me?
This, Publius: closer! while we wait our turn
I’ll tell you. Water’s warm (they ring inside)
At the eighth hour, till when no use to bathe.

Here in the vestibule where now we sit,
One scarce stood yesterday, the throng was such
Of loyal gapers, folk all eye and ear
While Lucius Varius Rufus in their midst
Read out that long-planned late-completed piece,
His Panegyric on the Emperor.
“Nobody like him,” little Flaccus laughed,
“At leading forth an Epos with due pomp!
Only, when godlike Cæsar swells the theme,
How should mere mortals hope to praise aright?
Tell me, thou offshoot of Etruscan kings!”
Whereat Mæcenas smiling sighed assent.

I paid my quadrans, left the Thermæ’s roar
Of rapture as the poet asked, “What place
Among the godships Jove, for Cæsar’s sake,
Would bid its actual occupant vacate
In favor of the new divinity?”
And got the expected answer, “Yield thine own!”—
Jove thus dethroned, I somehow wanted air,
And found myself a-pacing street and street,
Letting the sunset, rosy over Rome,
Clear my head dizzy with the hubbub—say,
As if thought’s dance therein had kicked up dust
By trampling on all else: the world lay prone,
As—poet-propped, in brave hexameters—
Their subject triumphed up from man to God.
Caius Octavius Cæsar the August—
Where was escape from his prepotency?
I judge I may have passed—how many piles
Of structure dropt like doles from his free hand
To Rome on every side? Why, right and left,
For temples you’ve the Thundering Jupiter,

Avenging Mars, Apollo Palatine:
How count Piazza, Forum—there's a third
All but completed. You've the Theatre
Named of Marcellus—all his work, such work!—
One thought still ending, dominating all—
With warrant Varius sang, "Be Cæsar God!"
By what a hold arrests he Fortune's wheel,
Obtaining and retaining heaven and earth
Through Fortune, if you like, but favor—no!
For the great deeds flashed by me, fast and thick
As stars which storm the sky on autumn nights—
Those conquests! but peace crowned them,—so, of peace
Count up his titles only—these, in few—
Ten years Triumvir, Consul thirteen times,
Emperor, nay—the glory topping all—
Hailed Father of his Country, last and best
Of titles, by himself accepted so:
And why not? See but feats achieved in Rome—
Not to say, Italy—he planted there
Some thirty colonies—but Rome itself
All new-built, "marble now, brick once," he boasts:
This Portico, that Circus. Would you sail?
He has drained Tiber for you: would you walk?
He straightened out the long Flaminian Way.
Poor? Profit by his score of donatives!
Rich—that is, mirthful? Half-a-hundred games
Challenge your choice! There's Rome—for you and me
Only? The centre of the world besides!
For, look the wide world over, where ends Rome?
To sunrise? There's Euphrates—all between!
To sunset? Ocean and immensity:
North, stare till Danube stops you: South, see Nile,
The Desert and the earth-upholding Mount.
Well may the poet-people each with each
Vie in his praise, our company of swans,
Virgil and Horace, singers—in their way—
Nearly as good as Varius, though less famed:
Well may they cry, "No mortal, plainly God!"

Thus to myself myself said, while I walked:
Or would have said, could thought attain to speech,
Clean baffled by enormity of bliss
The while I strove to scale its heights and sound
Its depths—this masterdom o'er all the world
Of one who was but born—like you, like me,
Like all the world he owns—of flesh and blood.
But he—how grasp, how gauge his own conceit
Of bliss to me near inconceivable?
Or, since such flight too much makes reel the brain,
Let's sink—and so take refuge, as it were,

From life's excessive altitude—to life's
Breathable wayside shelter at its base!
If looms thus large this Cæsar to myself
—Of senatorial rank and somebody—
How must he strike the vulgar nameless crowd,
Innumerous swarm that's nobody at all?
Why,—for an instance,—much as yon gold shape
Crowned, sceptred, on the temple opposite—
Fulgurant Jupiter—must daze the sense
Of—say, yon outcast begging from its step!
"What, Anti-Cæsar, monarch in the mud,
As he is pinnacled above thy pate?
Ay, beg away! thy lot contrasts full well
With his whose bounty yields thee this support—
Our Holy and Inviolable One,
Cæsar, whose bounty built the fane above!
Dost read my thought? Thy garb, alack, displays
Sore usage truly in each rent and stain—
Faugh! Wash though in Suburra! 'Ware the dogs
Who may not so disdain a meal on thee!
What, stretchest forth a palm to catch my alms?
Aha, why yes: I must appear—who knows?—
I, in my toga, to thy rags and thee—
Quæstor—nay, Ædile, Censor—Pol! perhaps
The very City-Prætor's noble self!
As to me Cæsar, so to thee am I?
Good: nor in vain shall prove thy quest, poor rogue!
Hither—hold palm out—take this quarter-as!"

And who did take it? As he raised his head,
(My gesture was a trifle—well—abrupt,)
Back fell the broad flap of the peasant's-hat,
The homespun cloak that muffled half his cheek
Dropped somewhat, and I had a glimpse—just one!
One was enough. Whose—whose might be the face?
That unkempt careless hair—brown, yellowish—
Those sparkling eyes beneath their eyebrows' ridge
(Each meets each, and the hawk-nose rules between)
—That was enough, no glimpse was needed more!
And terrifyingly into my mind
Came that quick-hushed report was whispered us,
"They do say, once a year in sordid garb
He plays the mendicant, sits all day long,
Asking and taking alms of who may pass,
And so averting, if submission help,
Fate's envy, the dread chance and change of things
When Fortune—for a word, a look, a naught—
Turns spiteful and—the petted lioness—
Strikes with her sudden paw, and prone falls each
Who patted late her neck superiorly,

Or trifled with those claw-tips velvet-sheathed."
"He's God!" shouts Lucius Varius Rufus: "Man
And worms'-meat any moment!" mutters low
Some Power, admonishing the mortal-born.

Ay, do you mind? There's meaning in the fact
That whoso conquers, triumphs, enters Rome,
Climbing the Capitolian, soaring thus
To glory's summit,—Publius, do you mark—
Ever the same attendant who, behind,
Above the Conqueror's head supports the crown
All-too-demonstrative for human wear,
—One hand's employment—all the while reserves
Its fellow, backward flung, to point how, close
Appended from the car, beneath the foot
Of the up-borne exulting Conqueror,
Frown—half-descried—the instruments of shame,
The malefactor's due. Crown, now—Cross, when?

Who stands secure? Are even Gods so safe?
Jupiter that just now is dominant—
Are not there ancient dismal tales how once
A predecessor reigned ere Saturn came,
And who can say if Jupiter be last?
Was it for nothing the gray Sibyl wrote
"Cæsar Augustus regnant, shall be born
In blind Judæa"—one to master him,
Him and the universe? An old-wife's tale?

Bath-drudge! Here, slave! No cheating! Our turn next.
No loitering, or be sure you taste the lash!
Two strigils, two oil-drippers, each a sponge!

DEVELOPMENT

My Father was a scholar and knew Greek.
When I was five years old, I asked him once
"What do you read about?"
"The siege of Troy."
"What is a siege, and what is Troy?"
Whereat
He piled up chairs and tables for a town,
Set me a-top for Priam, called our cat
—Helen, enticed away from home (he said)
By wicked Paris, who couched somewhere close
Under the footstool, being cowardly,
But whom—since she was worth the pains, poor puss—
Towzer and Tray,—our dogs, the Atreidai,—sought
By taking Troy to get possession of
—Always when great Achilles ceased to sulk,
(My pony in the stable)—forth would prance
And put to flight Hector—our page-boy's self.
This taught me who was who and what was what:
So far I rightly understood the case
At five years old; a huge delight it proved
And still proves—thanks to that instructor sage
My Father, who knew better than turn straight
Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance,
Or, worse yet, leave weak eyes to grow sand-blind,
Content with darkness and vacuity.

It happened, two or three years afterward,
That—I and playmates playing at Troy's Siege—
My Father came upon our make-believe.
"How would you like to read yourself the tale
Properly told, of which I gave you first
Merely such notion as a boy could bear?
Pope, now, would give you the precise account
Of what, some day, by dint of scholarship,
You'll hear—who knows?—from Homer's very mouth.
Learn Greek by all means, read the 'Blind Old Man,
Sweetest of Singers'—*tuphlos* which means 'blind,'
Hedistos which means 'sweetest.' Time enough!
Try, anyhow, to master him some day;
Until when, take what serves for substitute,
Read Pope, by all means!"
So I ran through Pope,
Enjoyed the tale—what history so true?
Also attacked my Primer, duly drudged,
Grew fitter thus for what was promised next—
The very thing itself, the actual words,
When I could turn—say, Buttmann to account.

Time passed, I ripened somewhat: one fine day,
"Quite ready for the Iliad, nothing less?
There's Heine, where the big books block the shelf:
Don't skip a word, thumb well the Lexicon!"

I thumbed well and skipped nowise till I learned
Who was who, what was what, from Homer's tongue,
And there an end of learning. Had you asked
The all-accomplished scholar, twelve years old,
"Who was it wrote the Iliad?"—what a laugh!
"Why, Homer, all the world knows: of his life
Doubtless some facts exist: it's everywhere:
We have not settled, though, his place of birth:
He begged, for certain, and was blind beside:
Seven cities claimed him—Scio, with best right,
Thinks Byron. What he wrote? Those Hymns we have.
Then there's the 'Battle of the Frogs and Mice,'
That's all—unless they dig 'Margites' up
(I'd like that) nothing more remains to know."

Thus did youth spend a comfortable time;
Until—"What's this the Germans say in fact
That Wolf found out first? It's unpleasant work
Their chop and change, unsettling one's belief:
All the same, where we live, we learn, that's sure."
So, I bent brow o'er *Prolegomena.*
And after Wolf, a dozen of his like
Proved there was never any Troy at all,
Neither Besiegers nor Besieged,—nay, worse,—
No actual Homer, no authentic text,
No warrant for the fiction I, as fact,
Had treasured in my heart and soul so long—
Ay, mark you! and as fact held still, still hold,
Spite of new knowledge, in my heart of hearts
And soul of souls, fact's essence freed and fixed
From accidental fancy's guardian sheath.
Assuredly thenceforward—thank my stars!—
However it got there, deprive who could—
Wring from the shrine my precious tenantry,
Helen, Ulysses, Hector and his Spouse,
Achilles and his Friend?—though Wolf—ah, Wolf!
Why must he needs come doubting, spoil a dream?

But then, "No dream's worth waking"—Browning says:
And here's the reason why I tell thus much.
I, now mature man, you anticipate,
May blame my Father justifiably
For letting me dream out my nonage thus,
And only by such slow and sure degrees
Permitting me to sift the grain from chaff,

Get truth and falsehood known and named as such.
Why did he ever let me dream at all,
Not bid me taste the story in its strength?
Suppose my childhood was scarce qualified
To rightly understand mythology,
Silence at least was in his power to keep:
I might have—somehow—correspondingly—
Well, who knows by what method, gained my gains,
Been taught, by forthrights not meanderings,
My aim should be to loathe, like Peleus' son,
A lie as Hell's Gate, love my wedded wife,
Like Hector, and so on with all the rest.
Could not I have excogitated this
Without believing such man really were?
That is—he might have put into my hand
The "Ethics"? In translation, if you please,
Exact, no pretty lying that improves,
To suit the modern taste: no more, no less—
The "Ethics:" 'tis a treatise I find hard
To read aright now that my hair is gray,
And I can manage the original.
At five years old—how ill had fared its leaves!
Now, growing double o'er the Stagirite,
At least I soil no page with bread and milk,
Nor crumple, dogs-ear and deface—boys' way.

REPHAN

How I lived, ere my human life began
In this world of yours,—like you, made man,—
When my home was the Star of my God Rephan?

Come then around me, close about,
World-weary earth-born ones! Darkest doubt
Or deepest despondency keeps you out?

Nowise! Before a word I speak,
Let my circle embrace your worn, your weak,
Brow-furrowed old age, youth's hollow cheek—

Diseased in the body, sick in soul,
Pinched poverty, satiate wealth,—your whole
Array of despairs! Have I read the roll?

All here? Attend, perpend! O Star
Of my God Rephan, what wonders are
In thy brilliance fugitive, faint and far!

Far from me, native to thy realm,
Who shared its perfections which o'erwhelm
Mind to conceive. Let drift the helm,

Let drive the sail, dare unconfined
Embark for the vastitude, O Mind,
Of an absolute bliss! Leave earth behind!

Here, by extremes, at a mean you guess:
There, all's at most—not more, not less:
Nowhere deficiency nor excess.

No want—whatever should be, is now:
No growth—that's change, and change comes—how
To royalty born with crown on brow?

Nothing begins—so needs to end:
Where fell it short at first? Extend
Only the same, no change can mend!

I use your language: mine—no word
Of its wealth would help who spoke, who heard,
To a gleam of intelligence. None preferred,

None felt distaste when better and worse
Were uncontrastable: bless or curse
What—in that uniform universe?

Can your world's phrase, your sense of things
Forth-figure the Star of my God? No springs,
No winters throughout its space. Time brings

No hope, no fear: as to-day, shall be
To-morrow: advance or retreat need we
At our stand-still through eternity?

All happy: needs must we so have been,
Since who could be otherwise? All serene:
What dark was to banish, what light to screen?

Earth's rose is a bud that's checked or grows
As beams may encourage or blasts oppose:
Our lives leapt forth, each a full-orbed rose—

Each rose sole rose in a sphere that spread
Above and below and around—rose-red:
No fellowship, each for itself instead.

One better than I—would prove I lacked
Somewhat: one worse were a jarring fact
Disturbing my faultlessly exact.

How did it come to pass there lurked
Somehow a seed of change that worked
Obscure in my heart till perfection irked?—

Till out of its peace at length grew strife—
Hopes, fears, loves, hates,—obscurely rife,—
My life grown a-tremble to turn your life?

Was it Thou, above all lights that are,
Prime Potency, did Thy hand unbar
The prison-gate of Rephan my Star?

In me did such potency wake a pulse
Could trouble tranquillity that lulls
Not lashes inertion till throes convulse

Soul's quietude into discontent?
As when the completed rose bursts, rent
By ardors till forth from its orb are sent

New petals that mar—unmake the disk—
Spoil rondure: what in it ran brave risk,
Changed apathy's calm to strife, bright, brisk,

Pushed simple to compound, sprang and spread
Till, fresh-formed, faceted, floreted,
The flower that slept woke a star instead?

No mimic of Star Rephan! How long
I stagnated there where weak and strong,
The wise and the foolish, right and wrong,

Are merged alike in a neutral Best,
Can I tell? No more than at whose behest
The passion arose in my passive breast,

And I yearned for no sameness but difference
In thing and thing, that should shock my sense
With a want of worth in them all, and thence

Startle me up, by an Infinite
Discovered above and below me—height
And depth alike to attract my flight,

Repel my descent: by hate taught love.
Oh, gain were indeed to see above
Supremacy ever—to move, remove,

Not reach—aspire yet never attain
To the object aimed at! Scarce in vain,—
As each stage I left nor touched again.

To suffer, did pangs bring the loved one bliss,
Wring knowledge from ignorance,—just for this—
To add one drop to a love-abyss!

Enough: for you doubt, you hope, O men,
You fear, you agonize, die: what then?
Is an end to your life's work out of ken?

Have you no assurance that, earth at end,
Wrong will prove right? Who made shall mend
In the higher sphere to which yearnings tend?

Why should I speak? You divine the test.
When the trouble grew in my pregnant breast
A voice said, "So wouldst thou strive, not rest?

"Burn and not smoulder, win by worth,
Not rest content with a wealth that's dearth?
Thou art past Rephan, thy place be Earth!"

REVERIE

[The Power everywhere visible in the universe, pervading everything, in all things from the atom to the sun, making man feel his utter helplessness and insignificance, requires no further demonstration. We are assured that Power is dominant. Our only difficulty is about Love. In face of the evil in the world, the inequalities in life, the dominance of evil, can we say with truth that the All-Powerful is the All-Loving too? Browning in Reverie says that truth comes before us here "fitful and half guessed, half seen, grasped at, not gained, held fast."... It is true that good struggles but evil reigns; yet earth's good is proved good and incontrovertibly worth loving, so far as it goes.... Let power "but enlarge good's strait confine," and perfection stands revealed. [Berdoe]]

I know there shall dawn a day
  —Is it here on homely earth?
Is it yonder, worlds away,
  Where the strange and new have birth,
That Power comes full in play?

Is it here, with grass about,
  Under befriending trees,
When shy buds venture out,
  And the air by mild degrees
Puts winter's death past doubt?

Is it up amid whirl and roar
  Of the elemental flame
Which star-flecks heaven's dark floor,
  That, new yet still the same,
Full in play comes Power once more?

Somewhere, below, above,
  Shall a day dawn—this I know—
When Power, which vainly strove
  My weakness to o'erthrow,
Shall triumph. I breathe, I move,

I truly am, at last!
  For a veil is rent between
Me and the truth which passed
  Fitful, half-guessed, half-seen,
Grasped at—not gained, held fast.

I for my race and me
  Shall apprehend life's law:
In the legend of man shall see
  Writ large what small I saw
In my life's; tale both agree.

As the record from youth to age
  Of my own, the single soul—
So the world's wide book: one page
  Deciphered explains the whole
Of our common heritage.

How but from near to far
  Should knowledge proceed, increase?
Try the clod ere test the star!
  Bring our inside strife to peace
Ere we wage, on the outside, war!

So, my annals thus begin:
  With body, to life awoke
Soul, the immortal twin
  Of body which bore soul's yoke
Since mortal and not akin.

By means of the flesh, grown fit,
  Mind, in surview of things,
Now soared, anon alit
  To treasure its gatherings
From the ranged expanse—to-wit,

Nature,—earth's, heaven's wide show
  Which taught all hope, all fear:
Acquainted with joy and woe,
  I could say, "Thus much is clear,
Doubt annulled thus much: I know.

"All is effect of cause:
  As it would, has willed and done
Power: and my mind's applause
  Goes, passing laws each one,
To Omnipotence, lord of laws."

Head praises, but heart refrains
  From loving's acknowledgment.
Whole losses outweigh half-gains:
  Earth's good is with evil blent:
Good struggles but evil reigns.

Yet since Earth's good proved good—
  Incontrovertibly
Worth loving—I understood
  How evil—did mind descry
Power's object to end pursued—

Were haply as cloud across
  Good's orb, no orb itself:
Mere mind—were it found at loss
  Did it play the tricksy elf
And from life's gold purge the dross?

Power is known infinite:
  Good struggles to be—at best
Seems—scanned by the human sight,
  Tried by the senses' test—
Good palpably: but with right

Therefore to mind's award
  Of loving, as power claims praise?
Power—which finds naught too hard,
  Fulfilling itself all ways
Unchecked, unchanged: while barred,

Baffled, what good began
  Ends evil on every side.
To Power submissive man
  Breathes, "E'en as Thou art, abide!"
While to good "Late-found, long-sought,

"Would Power to a plenitude
  But liberate, but enlarge
Good's strait confine,—renewed
  Were ever the heart's discharge
Of loving!" Else doubts intrude.

For you dominate, stars all!
  For a sense informs you—brute,
Bird, worm, fly, great and small,
  Each with your attribute
Or low or majestical!

Thou earth that embosomest
  Offspring of land and sea—
How thy hills first sank to rest,
  How thy vales bred herb and tree
Which dizen thy mother-breast—

Do I ask? "Be ignorant
  Ever!" the answer clangs:
Whereas if I plead world's want,
  Soul's sorrows and body's pangs,
Play the human applicant,—

Is a remedy far to seek?
  I question and find response:
I—all men, strong or weak,
  Conceive and declare at once
For each want its cure. “Power, speak!

“Stop change, avert decay
  Fix life fast, banish death,
Eclipse from the star bid stay,
  Abridge of no moment’s breath
One creature! Hence, Night, hail, Day!”

What need to confess again
  No problem this to solve
By impotence? Power, once plain
  Proved Power—let on Power devolve
Good’s right to co-equal reign!

Past mind’s conception—Power!
  Do I seek how star, earth, beast,
Bird, worm, fly, gain their dower
  For life’s use, most and least?
Back from the search I cower.

Do I seek what heals all harm,
  Nay, hinders the harm at first,
Saves earth? Speak, Power, the charm!
  Keep the life there unamerced
By chance, change, death’s alarm!

As promptly as mind conceives,
  Let Power in its turn declare
Some law which wrong retrieves,
  Abolishes everywhere
What thwarts, what irks, what grieves!

Never to be! and yet
  How easy it seems—to sense
Like man’s—if somehow met
  Power with its match—immense
Love, limitless, unbeset

By hindrance on every side!
  Conjectured, nowise known,
Such may be: could man confide
  Such would match—were Love but shown
Stript of the veils that hide—

Power's self now manifest!
  So reads my record: thine,
O world, how runs it? Guessed
  Were the purport of that prime line,
Prophetic of all the rest!

"In a beginning God
  Made heaven and earth." Forth flashed
Knowledge: from star to clod
  Man knew things: doubt abashed
Closed its long period.

Knowledge obtained Power praise.
  Had Good been manifest,
Broke out in cloudless blaze,
  Unchequered as unrepressed,
In all things Good at best—

Then praise—all praise, no blame—
  Had hailed the perfection. No!
As Power's display, the same
  Be Good's—praise forth shall flow
Unisonous in acclaim!

Even as the world its life,
  So have I lived my own—
Power seen with Love at strife,
  That sure, this dimly shown,
—Good rare and evil rife.

Whereof the effect be—faith
  That, some far day, were found
Ripeness in things now rathe,
  Wrong righted, each chain unbound,
Renewal born out of scathe.

Why faith—but to lift the load,
  To leaven the lump, where lies
Mind prostrate through knowledge owed
  To the loveless Power it tries
To withstand, how vain! In flowed

Ever resistless fact:
  No more than the passive clay
Disputes the potter's act,
  Could the whelmed mind disobey
Knowledge the cataract.

But, perfect in every part,
  Has the potter's moulded shape,
Leap of man's quickened heart,
  Throe of his thought's escape,
Stings of his soul which dart

Through the barrier of flesh, till keen
  She climbs from the calm and clear,
Through turbidity all between,
  From the known to the unknown here,
Heaven's "Shall be," from Earth's "Has been"?

Then life is—to wake not sleep,
  Rise and not rest, but press
From earth's level where blindly creep
  Things perfected, more or less,
To the heaven's height, far and steep,

Where, amid what strifes and storms
  May wait the adventurous quest,
Power is Love—transports, transforms
  Who aspired from worst to best,
Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms'.

I have faith such end shall be:
  From the first, Power was—I knew,
Life has made clear to me
  That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

When see? When there dawns a day,
  If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
  Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play.

EPILOGUE TO *ASOLANDO*

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
  When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
        —Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
  What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
        —Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
  Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
        Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
  Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever
        There as here!"

THE END